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The Teaching of Vocabulary.

By **Prof. Paul H. Grumann, Ph. D.**, University of Nebraska.

Some authorities have asserted that the mastering of a small vocabulary is the proper aim of an elementary course. It would not be impossible to work out the sentences of every day intercourse and to teach this rather simple vocabulary to the beginner in a comparatively short time. The pupil then would be helpless in all but a very limited range of reading. The child at six has such a knowledge, yet the schools devote eight years to the task of teaching it to read the mother tongue.

The difficulty that is found over and over again in second and third year classes, is that the child has no fund of words to fall back upon when it encounters new compounds. It is not rash to assume that the vocabulary has not been taught properly, or such a fund would be available.

Some help may be gleaned by observing the child as it acquires its mother tongue. The child hears a large amount of language daily that it does not understand at all. Gradually parts of this language are assimilated and understood. Still later a very small part is sufficiently mastered to be reproduced. This small part might be called the active vocabulary. The teacher is vitally interested in this active vocabulary and should teach it so thoroughly that it cannot be forgotten readily. But at the same time the child should acquire a larger group of words which can be recognized by ear or at sight, without being at the disposal of the child in active speech. Lastly, the child should have a first acquaintance with a large group of words that may be recalled to its consciousness. The process of learning then becomes a gradual assimilation of language material from the strange, the subconscious, the conversant into active consciousness.

How is the teacher to supervise these processes? Is she to follow the method of the home and subject the child to a large amount of language that it divines but does not understand? Such a method would be very good if she had as much time as the mother has in the home, not forgetting that the mother has the help of the whole family and the child's playmates. This suggests the crucial weakness of the direct method, as generally understood, for this method presents connected prose and ignores the fact that a comparatively large group of words should be mastered that cannot be worked into the connected selections without making these monotonous and silly.

A careful examination of many direct method books will show that they ignore, are forced to ignore a large part of the vocabulary of every day life. How many of them actually do teach the pupil the names of

the commoner animals, the house and the parts of the house, the common fruits, vegetables and trees, the organs of the body and the parts of the body? When these words are introduced, it depends upon their chance in the story, and their absence or presence in the course is largely a matter of accident.

No well informed teacher will deny that a word should be learned primarily in its sentence relationship. That remains the main association and therefore the recitation should be filled as full of German sentences as possible and the teacher should avail himself of every opportunity to lure, coax, prod, force the pupil to use them. But to say that the association of the word in the sentence is the only association that the teacher should cultivate, is to miss some of the best opportunities. A large number of analogies immediately suggest themselves; synonyms, antonyms and etymologies. All of these a normal, intelligent child uses constantly in learning the mother tongue. The teacher should also utilize them, but not necessarily in the slow and unguided way of the child.

In the field of analogy the richest opportunity is presented, especially in the elementary course. Foremost here is the analogy of mere sound, which the child comes to utilize almost automatically in acquiring language. The intelligent teacher, however, may further stimulate the habit and direct it wisely. Examples of such sound analogies are: *Ort—Wort; Sang—Klang; Rand—Band*. They are particularly helpful when slight differences denote a distinction: *sagen—sägen; sägen—der Segen; Ofen—offen; Sohn—Sonne; Ton—Tonne*.

Frequently analogy can be used in clearing up the gender of a word: *das Weib—das Kind; der Mund—der Zahn—der Schlund—der Magen—der Darm; die Lippe—die Zunge—die Wange—die Nase; das Auge—das Ohr*. Similarly irregular plurals of nouns may receive explanation: *die Männer—die Weiber; die Würmer—die Hühner; die Damen—die Herren—die Frauen*. No less helpful are the analogies of conception: *kalt—kühl—warm—heiss; Fuss—Hand; Zehe—Finger; Bein—Arm; Finger—Ring; Finger—Nagel; aufmachen—zumachen; öffnen—schliessen*. This leads naturally into the large and interesting field of synonyms and antonyms. The value of such analogies is that they teach the child the natural relations of words in one-tenth of the time required by the so-called natural process. They afford a rational and profitable short cut, just as sane grammar provides a short cut to construction.

But the most interesting field is etymology. Here the danger is that the pupil will be thrown in beyond his depth before he can swim at all. He should have enough simpler cases to get a safe start: *gross—Grösse; schön—Schönheit; frei—Freiheit; Braut—Bräutigam; Gans—Gänserich*. Later slight sound changes may be introduced: *heiss—Hitze; Schweiss—schwitzen; hoch—Höhe*. Careful presentation of “umlaut” clears up such

cases as: *Garten—Gärtner; alt—älter—Eltern; geben—Gift; vergessen—Vergissmeinnicht*. Here belong also words with o and u: *voll—füllen; schwören—Schwur; verlieren—verlor—Verlust*. In time nouns and adjectives may be derived systematically from verbs: *sprechen, sprach, gesprochen—die Sprache—das Sprichwort—der Spruch; fallen, fiel, gefallen—der Fall—die Falle; graben, grub, gegraben—das Grab—die Grube—das Grübchen—die Gruft*.

In etymology the work has often been made difficult because that was supposed to be scientific, when it was merely unpedagogical. The introduction of Grimm's and Verner's laws in elementary courses illustrates this tendency. The difficulty that these laws have for graduate students should be a warning to the teacher. On the other hand graduate students would not fumble so badly on these principles if they had anything like adequate training in easier and more plausible etymology before they become graduates.

Pseudo-science has also led to pedagogical error in the matter of popular etymology. The teacher of a course in elementary English in a German gymnasium would properly associate cut with cutlet in spite of the fact that cutlet comes originally from *cotelette*. The fact remains that the vast majority of English minds associate cut with cutlet and that is a valuable thing for the pupil to learn. On a strictly scientific basis it must be maintained that cut enters into the etymology of cutlet simply because the English mind has made this association for many years. We know that *frei* is not related to *Freitag* primarily, yet this is what the beginner should get. Later he should be taught that *Freitag* is really derived from *Frija*.

German is very much like Greek. Both languages build their compounds on their own root words, hence in both languages etymology is of prime importance. A student of English may learn the word "depend" as a mere memory feat if he has no knowledge of Latin. The student of German should learn *abhängen* only on the basis of *hangen*. Any other course will fail to get the German *Sprachgefühl* to the learner.

It has been asserted that the teacher should not teach etymologies that have become blurred to the German himself. This looks quite plausible, but nevertheless is an incorrect deduction. When the German uses the word *entzücken*, he may not be conscious of the fact that it is derived from *zücken* and *ziehen*, but these words are in the background of his consciousness. The English student of German cannot have them there unless they are put there.

To teach German without stressing these relations, is to kill German down to the level of those languages that are made up largely of foreign roots, to deprive it of its charm, of its latent poetical content. For this reason translating vocabularies are generally an unspeakable wrong to the

learner, for they give only one angle of the word and none of its vital associations.

The proper teaching of vocabulary calls for systematic work. To throw all the associations of a word at the pupil at once in the elementary stages of the work is nothing but bungling. The word should gradually grow into its associations, until the student has real difficulty in forgetting it. By accumulating the associations gradually the teacher makes every approach to the word interesting and enthusiasm grows as the work proceeds.

Luther's Attitude Toward Language Study.

By **Prof. W. W. Florer, Ph. D.**, University of Michigan.

In this age of educational reform it may be well for us to listen back through the centuries for a moment to discover whether or not the warning voices of the early prophets of modern life have been heeded. It is time to ask if we have followed Goethe's advice: "That which you have inherited from your fathers, you must acquire in order to possess."

Among the forerunners of the modern school system towers Martin Luther of whom we may still exclaim in the words of the young Lessing: "Luther, thou great, misknown man." Here we shall consider Luther, not as the religious reformer, but as a man who understood the educational needs of youth, when his country was engrossed in commerce and neglectful of a man's higher attainments. Only one phase of his observations can be considered — his attitude toward language study.

Does Luther speak as one having authority? He was one of the strongest interpretive teachers who ever held a chair in a German university. He was one of the most productive linguists the modern world has known. He was one of the first to recognize practically, if not the first to evolve, the theories on which our American school system had been founded. These theories are: that the schools should be one organic whole from the grades through the universities; that the moral, intellectual, and physical welfare of the youth should be cultivated; that schools do not exist for their own sake but for the state; that the state should maintain schools for its own good, as by furthering and encouraging all means of education it might have properly equipped men to govern.

Luther's attitude toward language study is colored by his theory of the purpose of education. He considered the importance of the mastery of the languages to be the mastery they give one to meet the problems of life, as well as to enjoy the treasures of master minds. He looked upon the power of speech as a divine gift for a divine purpose. He